Towns

Big Pine

Inyo County. County Superintendent of Schools

Resource Book about Inyo County

1. Big Pine, Past and Present

Pam. Inyo County Supt. of Schools ILL
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BIG PINE OCT 20 '89

BIG PINE, PAST AND PRESENT

Big Pine is on Highway 395. It is fifteen miles south of Bishop. It is twenty-five miles north of Independence. There are about 1000 people living in and around Big Pine. The highway signs say the population of Big Pine is 960. The elevation is 4000 feet above sea level.

Big Pine Creek comes from the Glacier, down the canyon. It comes across the town of Big Pine. It flows into the Owens River on the east side of town.

In the year 1857 some men entered the Owens Valley by the pass now called the Walker Pass. They were looking for coal. The valley was explored by Stephen Gregg, T.H. Henderson, W.T. Goodwin and Warren Matthews. Mr. Gregg decided to make a home in what is now called Big Pine. His was the first house and was built in 1864.

In 1869 many other people came to live in Big Pine. Duncan Campbell, Fred Reinhakel, W.F. Uhlmeyer and S.G. Gregg were settlers. William Baker had 160 acres in 1874 that is still known as the Baker Ranch. In that year many other cattlemen and miners came to Big Pine.

The first general store in Big Pine, was owned by Mr. Newland. It was later sold to Johnathan McMurry and Jack Moore. This general store was where the Chevron Station is now located. R.W. Thomas and Mr. Hill had a grocery store and post office located where Kahl's Hotel is now.

The saw mills, located on Big Pine Creek about a half mile below the pack station, were owned by James Steward.

In later years, S.G. Gregg owned a two story building which had the library, a candy store and the Wells-Fargo Express Office downstairs. Upstairs there was a doctor's office and rooms for rent.

The many freight wagons going through the valley would often stop at the Hession Ranch, just north of Big Pine for food and rest. Angus McDonald had a blacksmith shop between the present Chevron Station and Pete's garage. James Crocker's first land location was where the Glacier

Motel is now. The Big Pine Hotel was on that land. Later Mr. Crocker traded this hotel and the 160 acres of that place for five hundred head of cattle.

Mrs. Sarah Graham owned what was later known as the Butler Ranch. She shipped many kinds of fruits and nuts to mining camps in California and Nevada.

The acres that are now the Inyo County Farm were first owned by June Smith.

In the early days, one of the largest ranches near Big Pine was six miles south of Fish Springs. This beautiful ranch was owned by Walter Smith. Some of the stone buildings and orchards are still there today.

The mines near to Big Pine helped to make a busy town. Some of the most important mines were the Montezuma, the Blue Monster, the Bunker Hill and the Blue Star.

Zurich was a busy little railroad station called Alvord. The railroad was built along the old stagecoach road. From Alvord, now called Zurich, a toll road led over the White Mountains into Deep Springs Valley, where there were cattle ranches and mines. The charge for using the road was twenty-five cents.

On March 25, 1872 a great earthquake awakened the people of Owens Valley at three o'clock in the morning. Rock foundations,chimneys and cellars were ruined. It is said the dust was floating around in the air for days after the earthquake.

Charles Hunnewell brought to our class, two pages of information on the building of the Big Pine Community Church.

Mr. and Mrs. W.G. Dixon drew several plans for the church. The one that was chosen was one that they drew. Mr. Dixon laid the foundation for the church, four and five feet wide. On August 4, 1896 the cornerstone was laid. The land for the church was given by Charles Hunnewell's Grandfather. His name was Mr. James Crocker. Many men came to work on the church building. The men were in such a hurry to put on the roof that it

was not done carefully. It was so heavy it should have been supported in more places. Thewest wall began to bow. Changes had to be made. They caught the wall in time to keep it from falling. They added other supports. They could not take out the bowed wall without taking the whole building down. The ladies from the church in Bishop donated the pulpit chairs. Everyone else was asked to buy his own chair and one for a guest. One hundred forty-four chairs were ready for the dedication.

There is not very much information known about the Big Pine School before 1873. It stood where the Kenneth Nelson house is now on Home Street. The Big Pine Elementary District was formed in 1873. The Fish Springs District was formed in 1897 and the Aberdeen District in 1911. The Big Pine Union High School District was formed in 1908. It was made up of the elementary districts of Big Pine, Fish Springs and Aberdeen. A new school was built on the corner of Crocker and School streets, on land given by Mr. James Crocker. When our present building was finished, most of the old building on School street was moved across the street and added onto the Big Pine Community Church. Before our present school was built, there had been a separate school for all the Indian children. The Indian school was up Big Pine Creek at about the place where the Ranger station is now built.

On June 6, 1929, a flood started in the canyon near where Steward's Resort was later built. A big snowslide had come down and was later covered up by dirt washed down from another canyon. This formed an underground lake. Finally the water forced a hole in the dirt and rushed down Big Pine Creek, flooding parts of the town and three people were drowned.

In 1930, George Hall, Sam McMurry and Ray McDonald started the Glacier Lodge. The pack station on Big Pine Creek was started by Bob Logan about 1932. Bert Steward's Resort was opened in 1939. These places all helped to bring people to Big Pine.

Now people from many parts of our country come to Big Pine to fish and to hunt. In the summer many people come to camp along Big Pine Creek.

People come to Big Pine to hunt ducks, deer, rabbits, elk, quail, dove, pheasant, sage hens, crows, coyotes and chuckar.

People bring house trailers or tents to camp near Big Pine Creek. In many places the Forest Rangers have built rock stoves for campers to' use.

Many people in Big Pine raise food to sell. Beans, carrots, onions, eggs, cabbages, strawberries, apples, peaches, corn, watermelons, tomatoes, alfalfa and wheat are grown.

Some people in Big Pine raise animals to sell. Ducks, turkeys, rabbits, chickens, sheep and Hereford steers are sold.

People do many kinds of work in Big Pine. There are four service stations: Texaco, Standard, Union 76 and the Hay's service station also sells sporting goods.

Mrs. Mendenhall also has a sporting goods store. She sells the Los Angeles Times and the Inyo Register. She has the ticket office for the Greyhound bus. She sells many other things too.

There are three restaurants in Big Pine. They are Marie's Diner, Welch's and Rossi's Cafes. They all serve breakfast, lunch and dinner during the summer. Welch's closes during the winter.

There are four motels in Big Pine. They are the Glacier View, The Big Pine, The Starlight and the Old California. In the summer the motels are very busy, but in winter we do not have as many visitors.

Charles made a report on the Inyo County Farm, which is in Big Pine. Dr. Victor Hough is the doctor in charge of the hospital. The nurses are: Lucille Cyrus, Eveline Stone, and Jessie Nelson. In order to be admitted, a person must have lived in Inyo County for six months. They must not be able to work. If they have no money they may live at the farm.

Our Big Pine post office has about 500 pieces of mail every day. There are 232 post office boxes. The rent for the boxes depends on the size of the box. A small box rents for sixty-five cents for three months. A larger box rents for ninety cents and the largest size is $1.50 for three

months.

Big Pine has a branch of the Inyo County Free Library. The head librarian is Miss Mary Cavitt. The assistant librarian is Mrs. Snyder. Anyone that wants a library card must sign an application. If you are a child, your mother or father must sign the application also. The books are free if you do not keep them too long. There is a fine of two cents for each day that a book is kept overdue. Most books may be kept for two weeks.

For many years there were two grocery stores in Big Pine. One was owned by Mr. Vance. The other was owned by Mr. Bedell. On October 1, 1956, Mr. Bedell retired and sold his store to Mr. Vance. During the month of October there was just one grocery store open in Big Pine. About the middle of November, Darrell Wayland's father opened the second grocery store. He named it the "Big Pine Grocery".

Most of the boys and girls in our third grade were born in or near Big Pine. Our group has many names that have been well known, in this area, for many years.

Joe Steward's grandfather and his grandfather's three brothers were very early settlers. Charles Hunnevell's grandfather, James Crocker, has a local street named in his honor. The Westervelt and Sepsey families have lived in Big Pine for a long time. Others of us have not lived here so long, but are enjoying our life here.